Windows to Wildlife

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In This Issue . . .

The Idaho Watchable Wildlife Committee is comprised of the following agencies and organizations:

U.S. Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Forest Service
Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation
Idaho Audubon Council
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Idaho Department of Commerce
Idaho Department of Transportation
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Photos above: A pair of young American peregrine falcons inside the hack box at Centennial Marsh Wildlife Management Area. Nongame Biologist, Bruce Haak, and Wildlife Technician, Debbie Sparber, fitting one of the young peregrine falcons being hacked at the Centennial Marsh Wildlife Management Area with a radio transmitter.Photos by Scott Jay Bailey/ IDFG.

Peregrine Falcons Released at Centennial Marsh Wildlife Management Area

by Scott Jay Bailey, IDFG Magic Valley Region Nongame Biologist

On July 18, 2003 Idaho Department of Fish and Game biologists placed a group of juvenile American peregrine falcons (Falco peregrinus anatum) into a release box atop an approximately 20 foot tower at the Centennial Marsh Wildlife Management Area (WMA), on the Camas Prairie near Fairfield. This act marked a milestone in the early stages of an anticipated two-year effort to establish this magnificent avian predator in the skies over the Camas Prairie.

As a result of catastrophic population declines attributed primarily to the now banned insecticide DDT, two of the three peregrine falcon subspecies in the North America were listed as Endangered under the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969 (the predecessor to the Endangered Species Act of 1973). Most uses of DDT were banned in the United States in 1972, mainly because of its adverse effects on birds and other wildlife.

With the banning of DDT and initiation of a Herculean reintroduction effort by wildlife biologists (approximately 6,000 captive bred peregrines were released throughout the United States), peregrines began the long road to recovery in what would become one of the great success stories in wildlife conservation. In 1999, after years of steady population gains throughout much of the lower 48 states, American peregrine falcons were removed from the Endangered Species List (the other listed subspecies, which occurs primarily in northern Canada and Alaska was removed from the list in 1994).

Although no longer listed as Endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildife Service, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission lists the American peregrine falcon as a Protected Nongame Species. It is illegal to collect, harm, or otherwise remove Protected Nongame Species from their natural habitat.

Idaho was not immune from the population declines noted for peregrines. In 1975, what was thought to be the last wild American peregrine falcon nest in Idaho was identified in a remote area near Salmon.

During the 1980's and 1990's, a peregrine reintroduction program was carried out in Idaho. Releases during this period were primarily completed in the eastern portion of the

state as part of a cooperative effort among resource management agencies in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. The idea was to establish a core population in the greater Yellowstone area that could repopulate other parts of these states as numbers increased.

Because this reintroduction effort was costly and conservation dollars are always limited, few peregrines were released in other portions of Idaho. A few birds were released in southwestern Idaho, but none was released in south central portions of the state.

photo by Scott Jay Bailey/IDFG

To release captive-bred peregrines, young birds are placed in specially designed boxes on top of human-constructed towers or cliff ledges. Towers are used in areas where food resources are abundant, but where natural nesting substrates (tall cliffs) are lacking. Initially, the birds are fed through a chute so they cannot see their human benefactors. When they are old enough, the box is opened and the young peregrines begin testing their wings. Food place at the hack box is gradually reduced as the young falcons learn to hunt on their own. This process is known as "hacking."

In the early 1990's, Idaho Fish and Game Biologists Bruce Haak and Terry Gregory had the idea of hacking peregrines at the Centennial Marsh WMA.

Centennial Marsh WMA is an ideal place to release peregrines because it is a large protected area in a sparsely populated portion of the state and it supports abundant populations of many other bird species (the primary food source for peregrines). In addition, the nearby mountain ranges provided suitable natural nesting habitat and peregrines apparently had not repopulated the area on their own.

Funding limitations prevented a reintroduction effort at Centennial Marsh for nearly 10 years. However, in 2002 these two stalwart biologists reinitiated their plans to release peregrines at the prairie and began the long process of securing funding, permits, and captive bred birds to make it a reality.

Their efforts paid off. In the spring of 2003 Mr. Gregory constructed the hack tower at the WMA and Mr. Haak arranged to purchase hatchling American peregrine falcons from a breeder in California and secured other supplies needed to complete the project.

Two young peregrines were placed on the tower on July 18 and the hack box door was opened for this batch a week later. By the first week of August, these birds were flying around and exploring the prairie, while returning to the hack tower to feast on feeder quail placed on the tower daily by the attending biologist. These birds remained in the area and returned to the tower to feed until the last week of August, after which time they were no longer observed in the area.

Two additional young peregrines were placed in the tower on August 1, 2003. The hack box door was opened for these birds the following week. A predator killed one of these birds approximately two weeks after the box was opened. The other sustained lethal injuries while learning to fly and died around the same time.

Additional peregrine falcon releases at Centennial Marsh WMA are planned for spring/summer 2004.

Funding for this project was provided by Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Sawtooth National Forest. Additional support was provided by the Environmental Resource Center of Sun Valley and Idaho Power.

LEWIS AND CLARK: NATURAL HISTORIANS IN THE CENTRAL ROCKY MOUNTAINS

by Beth Waterbury, IDFG Salmon Region Nongame Biologist

Continued from the Previous Issue:

The clothing and ornaments of the Lemhi Shoshone were featured in many Lewis and Clark journal entries, with at least 20 different mammal species referenced. These records acknowledged Lewis and Clark as the discoverers and first describers of the mountain goat and the yellow-bellied marmot, the hides of which the Shoshone fashioned into robes. Of the mountain goat, Lewis wrote, "...the Indians... inform me that it is white and that it's horns are lunated comprest twisted and bent backward as those of the common sheep. I am now perfectly convinced that the sheep as well as the Bighorn exist in these mountains," then added, "Capt. C. saw one at a distance to day." Mountain goats currently range from southeastern Alaska south to southern Colorado, including several populations in alpine and subalpine habitats of the Central Rocky Mountains.

Mountain Goats/IDFG

Yellow-bellied marmots are widely distributed across the western U.S., but prefer talus slopes, rocky outcroppings, and rimrock habitats in the Central Rockies. Both mammals are somewhat reclusive, but a rewarding sight for the determined wildlife watcher.

Big Horn Sheep/IDFG

Other mammals used by the Lemhi Shoshone for apparel, ornaments, and tools were bison, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, deer, elk, river otter, striped skunk, long-tailed weasel, beaver, porcupine, red fox, grizzly bear, and gray wolf. Lewis also noted that the Shoshone coveted "the tail of the beautiful eagle or calumet bird [golden eagle] with which they ornament their own hair and the tails and mains of their horses."

On August 22, 1805 near the present day town of Tendoy, Idaho, Captain Clark discovered a robin-sized bird that would one day be named in his honor. The Clark's nutcracker was first described by Clark as "a species of woodpecker which fed on seeds of pine." In fact, this flashy black, white, and gray bird is a member of the Corvid family (jays and crows), which inhabits open coniferous forests and forest edges and clearings of the Rocky Mountains. Clark accurately noted this bird's preference for the seeds of white bark and limber pine. Its robust bill is well adapted for chiseling the nutritious pine seeds from the large cones. In addition, a specialized under-tongue pouch aids the bird in collecting and transporting pine seeds to ground caches. Here, the Clark's nutcracker stores its harvest by pushing seeds into the soil with its bill one at a time. Those seeds that aren't eaten over winter (which, incidentally, were planted at perfect "bill depth" for germination) become next year's generation of pine seedlings.

On August 26, 1805, near the confluence of the Lemhi and Salmon rivers, Clark reported seeing "Some fiew pigions." Though not a species new to science, his brief observation did provide the first record of passenger pigeons west of the Continental Divide.

On September 1, 1805, after realizing that the rugged Salmon River could not be navigated to the Columbia, the Corps of Discovery proceeded northward by land over Lost Trail Pass, crossing from present day Idaho into the Bitterroot Valley of Montana. With the aid of the Flathead Indians, the expedition procured more horses for the next stage of their journey across the Bitterroot Mountains along the historic Nez Perce Trail. Setting out on September 11, 1805, this leg of the expedition would prove to be the most harrowing of the entire journey. For 11 perilous days, the Corps endured hunger, cold, and exhaustion as they proceeded over what Sergeant Patrick Gass described as, "the most terrible mountains I ever beheld." The hardships of the trail silenced many of the journalists in the party as they sank into the misery of their plight. Lewis, however, managed to describe several new plant species and three new bird species.

On September 20, Lewis saw a bird with "a blue shining colour with a very high tuft of feathers on the head a long tale...in shape and action resembles the blue jay." This was the Steller's jay, which the captains referred to as the "blue-crested corvus." The Steller's jay is found in coniferous forest and pine/oak habitats from Alaska to Central America and is a common, showy, and noisy bird of open woodlands in the Central Rocky Mountains.

On this same day, Lewis recorded a rather remarkable birding feat, observing "Three species of Phesants..." - then unknown to science - in one day. The first was the "large black species" (blue grouse) Lewis had previously discovered in Montana. The second was "a brown and yellow species that a gooddeel resembles the phesant common to the Atlantic States..." later described as the Oregon ruffed grouse. The third species, "a smaller kind of a dark uniform colour with a red stripe above the eye..." was later named Franklin's or spruce grouse. The Oregon ruffed grouse is one of 12 subspecies of ruffed grouse that inhabit North America. The "brown and yellow" ruffed grouse observed by Lewis was obviously of a brown or intermediate "morph" (color phase), though gray and red morphs do occur in this subspecies. The spruce grouse also ranges widely across the dense conifer forests of North America. In the Central Rocky Mountains, spruce grouse inhabit spruce and pine forests with dense grass, shrub, and moss understories.

Ruffed Grouse/IDFG

Lewis's "grand slam" sighting of all three species of forest grouse in one day is still a distinct possibility for bird watchers in the varied forest habitats of Idaho and Montana.

The Corps of Discovery's arrival at Weippe Prairie, Idaho on September 22, 1805 was for each man a personal triumph over the formidable Rocky Mountains and testament to the captains' mettle, which originally inspired so much confidence in Jefferson. Lewis and Clark's ground-breaking scientific discoveries of so many new species of flora and fauna during the difficult portage across the Central Rockies is truly one of natural history's most heroic legacies.

Further Reading:

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Wildlife Canyon Scenic Byway Gets Improvements

Garden Valley, Idaho - To some it is known as the Banks-Lowman Road. To others it is known as Highway 17. The Forest Service refers to it as Forest Highway 24. In 1998, the State of Idaho designated it as the Wildlife Canyon Scenic Byway. It is a 33-mile long corridor that follows the South Fork Payette River from Banks to Lowman. The majority of the byway falls within the boundaries of the Boise National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management, all within Boise County. Local citizens and agencies worked together to produce a corridor management plan that identifies projects to enhance the intrinsic qualities of the byway. Two projects have been implemented: Byway signing and a wildlife viewing guide.

The Garden Valley Chamber of Commerce obtained funding from the Idaho Department of Transportation for colorful signs to identify the scenic byway status. Signs have been posted at the junction with Highway 55 (the Payette River Scenic Byway) and at the junction with Highway 21 (the Ponderosa Pine Scenic Byway). At two locations along the route, sign rests with colorful logos identify the byway's points of interest; e.g., Staircase Rapid, Pioneer Cemetery, Grimes Pass Dam, Pine Flats Hot Springs, and Deadwood Campground.

The new signs bring recognition to the byway with emphasis on the beauty of the canyon and the abundance of its wildlife and history. The sign project was coordinated by Jamie Anderson, president of the Garden Valley Recreation District and a member of the Wildlife Canyon Scenic Byway advisory committee. Local craftsman, Kurt Svenson, supplied the posts and hardware for the signs. The logo was produced by Pete Wilson Design Works and was approved by the advisory committee.

The Boise National Forest developed a brochure to educate visitors about safely viewing wildlife along the byway and it is a guide for highway travelers who come to the area in the winter to look at elk, deer, bald eagles, or wild turkeys. Forest visitors are advised to use plowed pullouts, to drive slowly, and to be alert for elk and deer on the road. A map shows the locations of the pullouts, restrooms, and local businesses providing gas, food, or lodging.

When members of the Wildlife Canyon Scenic Byway advisory committee worked on the scenic byway corridor management plan last year, several safety issues were raised about these visitors. "They often stop their vehicles in the middle of the road or veer into oncoming traffic while trying to catch a glimpse of the wildlife," says Ken Waugh, Boise National Forest Outdoor Recreation Planner.

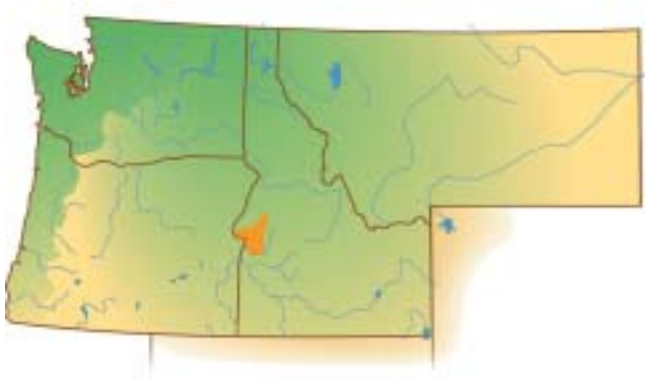
The brochure is now available at ranger districts in Lowman, Idaho City, Cascade, Emmett, and Mountain Home was well as at the BLM/Forest Service Visitor Center in Boise. It is also available on the Boise National Forest Web site at http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/boise

Ground Squirrel Article Clarification

In the last issue of Windows to Wildlife, the article on the Protected Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel and Southern Idaho Ground Squirrel may have caused some confusion. We would like to clarify the distribution of these species. The Southern Idaho Ground Squirrel is found north of the Payette River in Gem, Payette, and Washington counties. The Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel is found in Valley and Adams counties. Please review the distribution maps to clarify their ranges. Thank you.

Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel Range

Southern Idaho Ground Squirrel Range



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Coping With Cold

By Shelley Cooke, Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game

When winter approaches and cold weather draws near,
what happens to animals this time of year?

Can they put on a jacket to keep themselves warm,
or stay snuggled in bed during a harsh winter storm?

Perhaps take a trip to the place of their choice,
to a beach in the tropics to relax and rejoice?

If people can do it, can animals too?
Let's take a quick look and see if they do.

Early in the fall as the days start getting short,
I hear quacking and honking, creating a ruckus of sorts.

I look to the sky, for what it could be?
A flock of geese flying south, in the shape of a V.

I see a squirrel in the treetop, some nuts in his cheeks,
to store for the winter in the upcoming weeks.

He'll take them and hide them in some secret space,
and when he gets hungry, he'll search for that place.

The animals of the mountains, like the wolf, elk and goat,
all grow extra fur, for a thick winters coat.

Then in the springtime, they'll shed that thick pelt,
about the same time that the snow starts to melt.

I believe there is a rabbit who is know as a hare,
that during the winter changes the color he wears.

Most of the year he is dark head to toe,
but turns white during winter to blend in with the snow.

The frogs and the turtles that live in the lakes,
sleep buried in mud until spring when they wake.

They breath through their skin, which keeps them alive.
When the water warms up, they begin to revive.

I've heard that the bear will retreat to a den,
to sleep all winter through, no matter how long its been.

He prepares in the fall by eating more than his share.
Then emerges in springtime, looking no worse for wear.

Moles and chipmunks, and some kinds of mice,
will stay inside when it's cold and roam around when it's nice.

They will huddle together in a tight little ball,
and hide in their homes that they built in the fall.

People and animals are alike in some ways.
We all have a plan to survive cold winter days.

Some sleep, some snuggle, some fly south on their wings,
but all that really matters, is we survive until spring!

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